CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A blind clamping apparatus for holding a plurality of slats of a louvered blind assembly while a decorative graphic is applied to the slats, comprising:

a bottom frame having spaced apart right and left side portions arranged to extend generally perpendicular to the slats of the blind assembly to be held, and at least one connecting portion connecting the right and left side portions of the bottom frame;

a top frame having spaced apart right and left side portions that oppose the right and left side portions of the bottom frame, and at least one connecting portion connecting the right and left side portions of the top frame;

said bottom frame being hingedly connected to said top frame for pivoting movement between an open position in which the top frame is spaced from the bottom frame for receiving the slats of the blind assembly therebetween, and a closed position in which the right and left side portions of the top frame are in close proximity to the right and left side portions of the bottom frame for clamping the slats of the blind assembly therebetween, whereby the right and left side portions of the top and bottom frames define an exposed area therebetween for receiving a decorative graphic on the blind assembly.

2. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising at least one bracket disposed at an end of one of said top and bottom frames for holding a portion of the blind assembly which is not clamped between the top and bottom frames.

3. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said bracket is removably attached to said one of said top and bottom frames.

4. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 3, wherein each of said top and bottom frames has a boss for receiving said bracket, and said bracket is removably attachable to either of said top and bottom frames.

5. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said at least one bracket comprises a first pair of right and left brackets positioned at a first end of the clamping apparatus, and a second pair of right and left brackets positioned at a second end of the clamping apparatus, said first and second pairs of brackets providing respective first and second shelves at each end of the clamping apparatus for holding portions of the blind assembly which are not clamped between the top and bottom frames.

6. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 5, wherein each of said top and bottom frames has respective pairs of right and left bosses at each end thereof for receiving said brackets, and said brackets are selectively attachable to either or both of said top and bottom frames.

7. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said bracket comprises a first portion for attaching to a boss on one of the top and bottom frames, and

a second generally L-shaped portion that forms a shelf on which slats of the blind assembly can be supported.

8. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said at least one bracket comprises a first bracket attached to the top frame and a second bracket attached to the bottom frame opposing the first bracket, said first and second brackets cooperating with each other to support the slats of the blind assembly which are not clamped between the top and bottom frames as the clamping apparatus is rotated.

9. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said at least one bracket has a locating hole formed therein for aligning the clamping apparatus within a machine that applies the decorative graphic.

10. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a threaded fastener means for securing the top and bottom frames together in their closed position with the slats of the blind assembly sandwiched therebetween.

11. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a slip resistant pad material disposed on opposing faces of the right and left side portions of the top and bottom frames for providing a soft, slip resistant surface for engaging the slats of the blind assembly.

12. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the top and

bottom frames are generally rectangular with connecting portions extending between each end of the right and left side portions, wherein one of the connecting portions of the bottom frame is hingedly connected to one of the connecting portions of the top frame by a hinge, and further comprising a means for selectively fastening the other one of the connecting portions of the bottom frame to the other one of the connecting portions of the top frame to secure the top and bottom frames together in their closed position.

13. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 12, further comprising structures at each of the four corners of the top and bottom frames for removably attaching a plurality of brackets for holding slats of a blind assembly which are outside the rectangular shape defined by the top and bottom frames.

14. The blind clamping apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the plurality of brackets each comprises a connecting stem, and a generally L-shaped support portion extending from said connecting stem.

15. A clamping apparatus for holding a louvered blind assembly while a decorative graphic is applied thereto, comprising:

a pair of frames that are hingedly connected together for pivoting movement between an open position for receiving slats of the blind assembly therebetween, and a closed position in which the slats of the blind assembly are clamped therebetween;

means for securing the frames in their closed position; and

bracket means attached to the frames for holding portions of the blind assembly

that are not clamped between said frames.

16. The clamping apparatus for holding a louvered blind assembly according to claim 15, wherein said bracket means comprises a first pair of right and left brackets positioned at a first end of the clamping apparatus, and a second pair of right and left brackets positioned at a second end of the clamping apparatus, said first and second pairs of brackets providing respective first and second shelves at each end of the clamping apparatus for holding portions of the blind assembly which are not clamped between the top and bottom frames.

17. The system for holding a louvered blind assembly according to claim 16, wherein at least one of said brackets has a locating hole formed therein for aligning the clamping apparatus within a machine that applies the decorative graphic.

18. The system for holding a louvered blind assembly according to claim 15, wherein said frames each have spaced apart side portions arranged to extend perpendicular to the slats of the blind assembly, whereby an exposed area for receiving a decorative graphic on the blind assembly is created between the spaced apart side portions.

19. The clamping apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising a slip resistant pad material disposed on opposing faces of the frames for providing a soft, slip resistant surface for engaging the slats of the blind assembly.

20. A method of customizing a louvered blind assembly, comprising the steps of:

selecting a decorative graphic to be applied to the blind assembly;

providing a clamping apparatus having top and bottom frames, each frame having spaced apart side portions for engaging top and bottom surfaces of the blind assembly, respectively;

clamping a first plurality of slats of the blind assembly between the top and bottom frames with said side portions extending generally perpendicular to said plurality of slats; and

applying the decorative graphic to an exposed portion of said plurality of slats between said spaced apart side portions.

21. The method of customizing a louvered blind assembly according to claim 20, wherein said step of applying the decorative graphic comprises using a laser beam to change the appearance of at least one of the slats.

22. The method of customizing a louvered blind assembly according to claim 21, wherein said step of applying the decorative graphic comprises using a laser beam to perforate an outline of a graphic image into the slats of the blind assembly by pulsing a laser while tracing the image.

23. The method of customizing a louvered blind assembly according to claim 21, further comprising the step of using a laser beam to trim the edges of the slats of the blind

assembly in a desired pattern.

24. The method of customizing a louvered blind assembly according to claim 20, further comprising the step of holding portions of the blind assembly which are not clamped between the top and bottom frames using brackets positioned at each end of the clamping apparatus.